



The Rule For Attending To Oneself For One Dwelling In The World

By Saint Ignatii Brianchaninov

The soul of all practices in the Lord is VIGILANCE. Without VIGILANCE, all these practices are fruitless. He who is desirous of saving himself must so establish himself that he might remain continuously VIGILANT toward HIMSELF, not only in solitude, but also under conditions of distraction, into which he is sometimes unwillingly drawn by circumstances.

Let the fear of God outweigh all other sensations upon the scales of your heart; and then will it be convenient for you to be VIGILANT TOWARD YOURSELF, both in the silence of your kellia [cell] and in the midst of the noise that surrounds you from all sides.

A well-reasoned moderation in foodstuffs, diminishing the passionate heat of his blood, tends greatly to facilitate your being able to ATTEND TO YOURSELF; while the impassioning of your blood, stemming, as it does, from an excessive consumption of foodstuffs, from extreme and intensified bodily movements, from the inflammation of wrath, from being heady with vanity, and by reason of other causes, gives rise to a multitude of thoughts and reveries—in other words, to distraction. The Holy Fathers, first of all, ascribe to such a one as is desirous of ATTENDING TO HIMSELF a moderate, evenly-measured, constant abstention from food. (*Philokalia*, Pt. II, Ch. of St. Philotheus of Sinai.)

Upon awakening from sleep—an image of the awakening from the dead, which awaits all men—direct your thoughts to God, offering up to Him the first thoughts of your mind, which has not yet become imprinted with any vain impressions whatsoever.

Having carefully fulfilled all the needs of the flesh upon arising from sleep, quietly read your customary rule of prayer, taking care not so much for the quantity of your prayerful expression, as for the quality of it; i.e., do it ATTENTIVELY, so that, by reason of your ATTENTION, your heart might be enlightened and enlivened through prayerful feeling and consolation. Upon concluding your rule of prayer, again, direct all your strength to the ATTENTIVE reading of the New Testament, primarily the Gospel. In the course of this reading, intently take note of all the instruc-

tions and commandments of Christ, so that you might direct all your actions—both manifest and veiled—in accordance with them.

The quantity of the reading is determined by one's strength and by one's circumstances. It is unnecessary to weigh down one's mind with an excessive reading of prayers and Scripture; likewise, is it unnecessary to neglect one's needs in order to practice immoderate prayer and reading. Just as the excessive use of foodstuffs disorders and weakens the belly, so too does the immoderate use of spiritual food weaken the mind and create in it a revulsion to pious practices, leading it to despair. (Saint Isaac the Syrian, "Sermon 71")

For the novice, the Holy Fathers suggest frequent—but brief—prayers. When one's mind matures with spiritual age, becoming stronger and more manly, then shall one be in proper condition to pray without ceasing. It is to such Christians as have attained to maturity in the Lord that the words of the Apostle Paul pertain:

I desire, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without anger and reproach (I Tim. II, 8) i.e., dispassionately, and without any distraction or inconstancy. For that which is natural to the man is not yet natural to the infant.

Enlightened, through prayer and reading, by our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, one may then go forth to carry out the affairs of one's daily course, VIGILANTLY taking care that in all one's deeds and words, in one's entire being, the All-holy will of God might prevail, as it was revealed and explained to men in the Commandments of the Gospel.

Should there be any free moments during the course of the day, use them to read ATTENTIVELY some chosen prayers, or some chosen portions of Scripture; and, by means of these, fortify the powers of your soul, which have become exhausted through activity in the midst of a world of vanities.

Should there not be any such golden moments, it is necessary to regret their loss, as though it were the loss of a valuable treasure. What is wasted today should not be lost on the day following, because our heart conveniently gives itself up to negligence and forgetfulness, which lead to that dismal ignorance, so ruinous of Divine activity, of the activity of man's salvation.

Should you chance to say or to do something that is contrary to God's commandments, immediately treat your fault with repentance; and, by means of sincere contrition, return to the Way of God, from which you

stepped aside through your violation of God's will. Do not linger outside the Way of God! Respond with faith and humility to sinful thoughts, reveries and sensations by opposing to them the Gospel commandments, and saying, along with the holy patriarch Joseph:

HOW SHALL I SPEAK THIS EVIL WORD AND SIN BEFORE GOD? (Gen. XXX, 9)

One who is VIGILANT toward oneself must refuse himself all reverie, in general—egadless of how attractive and well-appearing it might seem, for all reverie is the wandering of the mind, which flatters and deceives it, while being outside the truth, in the land of non-existent phantoms, and incapable of realization. The consequence of reverie are: loss of VIGILANCE toward oneself, dissipation of the mind, and hardness of heart during prayer whence comes distress of the soul.

In the evening, departing into slumber—which in relation to the day just past, is death—examine your actions during the course of that day. Such [self-] examination is not difficult, since, in leading an ATTENTIVE life, that forgetfulness which is so natural to a distracted man is destroyed through VIGILANCE TOWARD ONESELF. And so, having recollected all your sins, whether through act, or word, or thought, or sensation, offer your repentance to God for them, with both the disposition and the heart-felt pledge of self-amendment. Later, read the rule of prayer concluding the day which was begun by meditating upon God by meditating, once again, upon God. Whither do they depart—all the thoughts and feelings of a sleeping man? What mysterious state of being is this sleep, during which the soul and body are both alive and yet not alive, being alienated from the awareness of their life, as though dead? Sleep is as incomprehensible as death. In the course of it, one's soul reposes, forgetting the most cruel earthly afflictions and calamities that have beset it, while it images its eternal repose; while one's body . . . if it rises from sleep will also arise, inevitably from the dead.

The great Agathon said: "It is impossible to succeed in virtue without exerting vigilance toward oneself." (The Patericon of Skete Amen.)

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Written For A Certain Layman

As a Result of His Desire

To Live A Vigilant Life In The World



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